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ABSTRACT

In recent years various structural approaches have been used in the United States to improve the delivery of elementary and secondary educational services to rural students. Post World War II interest in reorganization of local districts into larger administrative units has shifted to three other approaches popularized in the 1970's (each with supporters and opponents), i.e., provisions of specialized services from decentralized state education agencies (SEAs), formation of special district education service agencies (ESAs), and development of education cooperatives. A current study of characteristics of 31 networks of all types of service agencies in 26 states reveals that a majority of the Special District ESAs are making more significant contributions of programs and services to public Local Education Agencies (LEAs) than a majority of the Regionalized and Cooperative ESA networks. Most Special Districts have a more comprehensive, faster growing staff. Federal involvement in all three approaches appears crucial. Regional SEA/ESAs enjoy more state involvement and Cooperatives have more public LEA involvement. The federal government should adopt a consistent funding policy for ESAs and all districts should receive their fair share of services. Federal school improvement efforts should take advantage of the unique ability of ESAs to service rural schools. (SB)

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STRUCTURAL APPROACHES TO MEETING RURAL EDUCATION NEEDS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper identifies structural approaches used in the United States to improve the delivery of educational services for elementary and secondary school age children and youth attending schools in rural areas. Emphasis in the paper is on the following topics:

1. A Federal perspective on rural education needs;
2. An historical overview is presented of policy decisions made at the state and local levels in the recent past one-half century for the intended purpose of improving educational practice in rural schools. Major changes in approach to the structure of rural schools are reviewed;
3. A review of the implementation of three of the more recent significant structural approaches is provided. Highlighted in this portion of the paper are characteristics of the three approaches used in a large number of states included in a descriptive study that is soon to be completed;
4. The paper concludes with recommendations for federal legislative and administrative action for consideration by the participatants at this Seminar. They should also be of interest to others who wish to improve rural education by reducing the major structural constraints faced by schools in many rural communities.

A FEDERAL PERSPECTIVE ON RURAL EDUCATION NEEDS

Federal policy regarding rural education must be driven by two concerns: assuring equity and improving quality. The Federal government should also be concerned with seeing that provisions are made for rural schools to share equitably in federally mandated and supported programs to improve education, such as special education and teacher centers. In any of its efforts to achieve these goals, of course, there is an interest in seeing that there is an efficient and effective application of federal resources.

Proportionately fewer dollars are spent for the education of students in rural schools than for their urban and suburban conterparts. Even in terms of real purchasing power, most rural schools spend less. Only in the most homogeneously rural states -- those with evenly distributed resources and no major metropolitan centers -- is there anything approaching equity in spending power.

Nor is there equity in terms of access to educational services. Many rural communities have only limited access to desired educational services compared to those available in cities and suburbs. High quality vocational education, for instance, is scarce in some rural areas of the country. Most small rural communities are unable to offer their students a range of options, not just in the traditional sense of variety of course offerings, but in the broader and more essential sense of increasing life choices.

Local control of education is inherent in the American system, but the concept has special significance for rural communities. Rural

schools have been historically unique in the high degree of local involvement in the educational process and in the responsiveness of schools to local situations and community needs. State education systems and federal education programs have not always respected this value. To be effective, education service delivery systems promoted by the federal government and others, must acknowledge and respect local control and must be responsive to local needs.

Schools in rural areas must value highly their unique rural identity which has traditionally been a source of national stregth. Schools are an indispensible part of the rural social fabric and must be free to reflect those values and to strengthen them in their students. Federal initiatives must be careful not to interrupt or subvert that process.

Much of rural America is economically depressed. Schools offer one of the few resources available to many communities to help them improve their long term economic condition. Yet such possiblities are foreign to most communities and little is being done across the nation to tie schools to programs of rural economic development. Federal policy could facilitate that process, and imaginative service delivery systems could increase its potential.

STRUCTURAL APPROACHES FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL EDUCATION: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Policy planners and decision makers at the state and local levels, have used a number of structural approaches for the improvement of rural education in this nation. In the post World Ward II period, four basic approaches to alter the traditional delivery systems have been used. These are:

1. the reorganization of local school districts into larger administrative units;
2. the provision of specialized services through decentralization of the state education agency;
3. the formation of educational cooperatives; and
4. the formation of special district education service agencies.

Each of these approaches has been used singly or in combination in a large number of states. Each has its advocates and opponents. Presented next is a discussion of themes of the major arguments advanced by both proponents and opponents of each optiom.

Reorganization of Local School Districts

Historically, the formation of larger school district administrative units by combining two or more districts has been the most popular approach used by state and local planners. The widespread adoption of the alternative contributed to a dramatic reduction in the number of local districts in the nation from approximately 106,000 in 1948 to 15,913 in the fall of 1978, a reduction of approximately 90,000 LEAs.

Another perspective on the decrease in the number of operating units in the past approximate half-century is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1

PERCENT REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF OPERATING PUBLIC LEAs 1930 - 1978

Period	Percent Reduction in Number of Operating Districts
1930 - 1939	8.6
1940 - 1949	28.2
1950 - 1959	52.4
1960 - 1969	55.0
1970 - 1978	4.0

As illuestrated above, the use of this approach has markedly subsided in the decade of the 1970s. The great bulk of the operating districts continue to enroll few students.[2]

The most common approaches to local district reorganization were the following: reorganization through legislative mandate (particularly with regard to the elimination of non-operating and non-unified districts); reorganization through the passage of permissive legislation allowing, through local initiative, the merger of two or more districts; and, reorganization through a combination of legislative and regulatory incentives and penalties (particularly with regard to the establishment of formulae for the distribution of state aid and the establishment of minimal approval standards for local district operations).

The themes of the principal arguments most regularly advanced by proponents of local school district reorganization have generally focused on the following:

1. larger districts approaching a desired minimal enrollment standard of from 5,000 to 10,000 students (the consensus range) can provide most of what is accepted as a comprehensive program of instruction and a large number of what is recognized as essential support services to meet the needs of most students;
2. larger districts can better attain a degree of staff specialization required to offer a relatively comprehensive program of high quality;
3. larger districts can provide both basic and specialized services with efficiency and economy; and,
4. larger districts can more successfully sustain the quality of education and can better serve as an advocate for the community in relating to external agencies.

The themes of the principal arguments used by opponents of local school district reorganization have generally focused on the following:

1. even conceding the desirability of a larger minimal student enrollment standard, the demographic and geographic characteristics of many regions of most states preclude the formation of larger districts;
2. certain philosophical bases of public education in this nation would be seriously undermined if the schools are removed from direct visibility of the communities they serve;
3. even the consensus minimal enrollment standards are too small to achieve economies of scale in the delivery of many highly specialized programs;
4. the evidence supporting the contention that larger is better is meager; and
5. the creation of larger units would ordinarily require mandatory legislation, a strategy having little political flexibility.

The school supervisory unions in the New England States represent still another attempt at cooperation in an essentially rural area where independence and local autonomy are strong characteristics. In most instances the supervisory union is a legal entity which can own property, enter into contracts and receive state and federal funds. The primary role of the union is to provide administrative and supervisory services to the member districts. The supervisory union may provide shared services to the member districts, but this is a secondary function and usually not broadly engaged in.

Eac h of the member districts of a supervisory union is autonomus in that it electe its own board of education. The board of the union is not popularly elected, but is comprised of representatives of the component boards. Understandably, only limited policy making, planning and decision

making occur at the supervisory union level; for the most part these remain in the hands of the boards and principals of the member districts.

Provision of Services by Decentralization of the State Education Agency

A second major structural alternative employed in recent years is one in which a number of states have decentralized their state education agencies for the purpose of increasing services to local units, particularly rural schools.

The themes of the main arguments advanced by advocates of the use of this alternative are viewed to be the following:

1. the state has the ultimate responsibility for the elementary-secondary education; it follows, then, that the administrative arm of the state, the SEA, should provide necessary programs and services that cannot be provided locally;
2. the provision of services by the SEA will more likely result in the best use of state monies for the furtherance of state-wide priorities;
3. programs and services offered directly by the SEA will be more likely to reduce administrative costs than if offered by an intermediate unit of school government; and
4. the provision of services by the SEA would more likely result in improved communication between the provider of the services, the SEA, and the consumer of the services, the LEA, than would be the case if another "middle unit" were utilized.

The themes of the principal arguments advanced by those who oppose this alternative appear to be the following:

1. the operation of programs and services by the SEA may tend to distract the state unit from its consensus role--that of providing leadership, coordination, and planning for the state system, and serving as the advocate for elementary-secondary education in the state;
2. the operation of programs and services by the state would seriously drain resources available to the SEA
3. the provision of programs and services by the state may promote undersirable standardization;
4. the impact of services provided by the SEA may be lessened because of built-in conflict with the numerous and necessary regulatory roles that the state agency must perform; and
5. in most state systems, there appear to be far too many LEAs to be adequately served by the SEA.

The Formation of Cooperatives

While the use of formal or informal educational cooperatives has been common in a number of states for many years, the most extensive use of this alternative has occurred in the past decade. In these arrangements, the LEAs participating in the consortium typically have complete or substantial discretionary authority to establish the governance, organizational, and programming features of the cooperative, consistent with the view that the cooperative is essentially established to provide services exclusively to member schools.

The major arguments advanced by advocates of this approach appear to be the following:

1. the local units could potentially have access to a large number of necessary programs and servic es while retaining their legal and political identity;
2. the membership of the consortium would tend to have maximum freedom to buy into the cooperative only when that which is held to be essential in meeting local needs;
3. the cooperative would ordinarily be subject to annual renewal and thus could be dissolved with relative ease;
4. because the cooperative is a creation of the members of the consortium, it would tend to be highly responsive and accountable to the membership; and
5. the cooperative would ordinarily have little or no external interventions.

The themes of the principal arguments advanced by those opposed to the extensive use of this alternative appear to be the following:

both regional and statewide research, development, evaluation, and dissemination networks and promote the concentration and better use of resources to foster the networks once in place.

The themes of concerns raised by opponents of this alternative appear to be the following:

1. the provision of services by a special district ESA can perpetuate marginal LEAs if countering statutorial and regulatory directives are absent;
2. the establishment of special district ESAs could create an unnecessary additional larger of school government which might not be responsive to the needs of either LEAs or the SEA if the decision making processes of the units lack adequate checks-and-balances;
3. special district ESAs can potentially compete with LEAs for state and regional resources; and
4. where arrangements for LEA and SEA input is absent or weak, potential dysfunctions appear to be highly probable; conversely, heavy reliance on the purely voluntary involvement of [illegible] groups tends to place special district ESAs in a weak planning and operating posture.

The Formation of Special District Education Service Agencies

The fourth major structural approach used in a large number of states calls for the establishment of a legally constituted special district education service agency (ESAs) sitting between the state education agency and a collection of local school districts. In some cases this is accomplished by restructuring existing intermediate units to make them more service oriented. While these units also perform services for the state, their major role is to provide services to local units. The provision of services to rural schools was a primary motivation for establishing such units.

The principal arguments offered by proponents of the option appear to be the following:

1. the establishment of special district education service agencies can facilitate the provision to LEAs of easily accessible, dependable and layer self-determined supplemental and support services;
2. special district ESAs can contribute to the equalization of educational opportunity by providing specialized services to schools with low enrollment or limited financial resources;
3. special district ESAs can contribute to the quality of many specialized services needed by local districts;
4. special district ESAs can contribute to the efficient operation of many specialized services needed by local units;
5. special district ESAs can contribute to the establishment of a platform for the resolution of regional and state needs; and
6. special district ESAs can contribute to the development of

1. the usual short-term nature of cooperative agreements tends to make such arrangements vulnerable to changes in the make-up and/or attitudes of governing boards, administrators, and operating personnel of the participating LEAs;
2. the usual short-term nature of cooperative agreements tends to place a serious constraint on desirable program continuity and on long-range planning;
3. the usual absence of a structure to promote cooperation by itself contributes to a lack of interest or lack of incentive to cooperate;
4. the procurement and retention of staff tends to be inhibited by the usual short-term nature of the cooperative; and
5. in many ways the legal constraints on the operation of a cooperative, versus a more conventional legal entity, can seriously limit its effectiveness, particularly with regard to the acquisition of necessary facilities and equipment.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THREE STRUCTURAL APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE DELIVERY OF SERVICE IN RURAL AREAS: A DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES IN TWENTY-SIX STATES

Introduction

Three of what are regarded to be the more significant structural approaches of the improvement of elementary-secondary education in state systems of education, particularly rural schools[4] are the subject of a descriptive study that is in its closing phase. Highlighted in the current study are special district education service agencies, regionalized state education agencies, and cooperatives.

The current study examines selected characteristics of the establishment, governing boards, executive officers, organization and management, finance, programs, staff, physical facilities, and state education agency relationships of thirty-one networks of service agencies of the three types found in twenty-six states. A total of 314 individual service units are included in the study.

The titles and year of establishment of each of the networks is shown in Table 2. It is to be noted that eleven of the networks were identified as Special District ESA systems, seven were identified as Regionalized SEA/ESA systems, and the remaining thirteen were classified as Cooperative ESA systems. The 314 individual units participating in the study distributed among the three types of networks as follows:

Special District ESAs	208 of a potential 368, or 56.5 percent
Regionalized SEA/ESAs	36 of a potential 37, or 97.3 percent
Cooperative ESAs	70 of a potential 96, or 72.9 percent

TABLE II. 1 YEAR OF INITIAL ESTABLISHMENT OF NETWORKS AND TITLE OF UNITS

Type of ESA and State	Year Initially Established	Title of Units
TYPE A: SPECIAL DISTRICT ESA		
1. California	1859	Office of County Superintendent of Schools
2. Illinois	1975	Educational Service Region
3. Iowa	1975	Area Education Agency
4. Michigan	1963	Intermediate School District
5. New York	1948	Board of Cooperative Educational Services
6. Ohio (COE)	1914	County Office of Education
7. Oregon	1963	Education Service District
8. Pennsylvania	1971	Intermediate Unit
9. Texas	1967	Regional Educational Service Center
10. Washington	1965	Educational Service District
11. Wisconsin	1965	Cooperative Education Service Agency

TYPE B: REGIONALIZED SEA/ESA		
1. Massachusetts (REC)	1966	Regional Education Center
2. New Jersey (EIC)	1977	Educational Improvement Center
3. New Jersey (CSS)	1906	County Superintendent of School
4. Ohio (SERRC)	1969	Special Education Regional Resource Center
5. Ohio (FSAC)	1966	Field Services Area Coordinator
6. North Carolina	1971	Regional Education Center
7. Oklahoma	1974	Regional Education Service Center

TYPE C: COOPERATIVE ESA		
1. Alaska	1976	Regional Resource Center
2. Colorado	1965	Boards of Cooperative Services
3. Connecticut	1972	Regional Educational Service Center
4. Georgia	1966	Cooperative Education Service Agency
5. Indiana	1973	Education Service Center
6. Maryland	1970	Regional Education Service Agency
7. Massachusetts (EC)	1966	Educational Collaborative
8. Minnesota	1973	Educational Cooperative Service Unit
9. Nebraska	1965	Educational Service Unit
10. Ohio (RESA)	1975	Regional Education Service Agency
11. Rhode Island	1975	Regional Vocational Technical Facility
12. South Carolina	1967	Education Service Center
13. West Virginia	1972	Regional Education Service Agency

Working definitions used to classify the networks were:

Type A: Special District ESA

A legally constituted unit of school government sitting between the state education agency and a collection of local education agencies. This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established by the state, or the state and local education agencies acting in concert, to provide services to both the SEA and constituent LEAs. Dominant characteristics appear to be: (1) legal franework: tends to be structured in legislation and/or SEA regulations; (2) governance: tends to be lay control; (3) programs and services: tends to be a mix of services for member LEAs and SEA; and (4) fiscal: tends to be a mix of local, regional, state and state/federal.

Type B: Regionalized SEA/ESA

A regional branch of the state education agency. This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established as arms of the state to deliver services for the state education agency. Dominant characteristics appear to be: (1) legal framework: tends to be structured in SEA regulations only; (2) governance: tends to be professional advisory only; (3) programs and services: almost exclusively state and/or state/federal. These units were further subdivided into those providing administrative services only; those providing general services only; and, those providing both administrative and general services.

Type C: Cooperative ESA

A loose consortium of local education agencies. This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established by two or more local education agencies to provide services exclusively to members of the cooperative. Dominant characteristics appear to be: (1) legal framework: tends to be general (e.g., intergovernmental relations statutes): (2) governance: tends to be professional advisory only; (3) programs and services: almost exclusively local and state/federal. These units were further subdivided into those that were: multi-purpose (5 or more services); those that were limited-purpose (not more than 4 services) and those that were single-purpose.

It is felt that the eleven Special District ESA networks represent virtually all of the state systems of this type in operation in the nation in 1977-78, the last year of the current study. Moreover, the seven state systems of Regionalized SEA/ESAs are viewed to be representative of the implementation of this alternative by SEAs. The thirteen state systems of Cooperative ESAs are also viewed to be representative of the use of this option.

Below are a number of the major findings of selected features of the three types of ESA networks. Emphasis is given here to the establishment, financing, programs and services, and staffing characteristics and tendencies of the three types:

1. The majority of the Special District and Regionalized SEA/ESA networks were established through the enactment of mandatory legislation or regulation by a state level agency. The majority of Cooperative ESAs were established through enactment of permissive legislation or regulation of a state level agency.
2. The majority of Special District systems are statewide in scope and public LEA membership is mandated. All of the Regionalized systems are statewide and public LEA membership is also mandated. Only a few of the thirteen Cooperative systems are statewide in scope, and, in a majority of cases, public LEA membership is voluntary.

3. All of the Special District ESA systems have elected governing boards, whereas less than a majority of Regionalized systems have a governing board of any type, elected or appointed. A majority of Cooperative systems also have governing bodies but various means are used to select these groups. Most typically, representatives of public LEAs, either members of governing boards or chief executive officers, serve on the ESA boards.
4. Few of the governing boards of any of the three types have taxing authority,
5. A majority of the Special District and Cooperative systems have either mandatory or voluntary general purpose, budget or program advisory committees composed primarily of representatives of public LEAs.
6. A majority of the governing boards and executive officers of all three types have no authority to review or approve any aspects of LEA operations.
7. Differences exist in the financial support base used to support the operations of the Special District and Cooperative systems in 1977-78. While both received similar proportions of their revenues from within the ESAs (38 percent and 36 percent, respectively), the Special District units received a greater percent of their mean revenues from the state (41 percent compared to 28 percent for Cooperative units). On the other hand, Cooperative units were more dependent on

federal monies than their counterpart Special District units (28 percent and 18 percent, respectively).

8. Differences exist between the three types of networks and the type and comprehensiveness of programs and services offered by the units in 1977-78. The Special District units offered the most comprehensive services with respect to the following:

   a. direct instructional services to students enrolled in public LEAs (i.e., education of pupils with handicapping conditions, vocational/occupational education, adult education, bilingual education, general academic instruction, gifted/talented, migrant education, and pupil personnel services;

   b. indirect instructional services (i.e., pupil diagnosis/prescription, curriculum services, media and library services, data processing, and professional staff development.

   c. a range of management services to public LEAs.

   d. a range of services for the state education agencies; and,

   e. services to nonpublic schools. Few Regionalized SEA/ESAs offered direct instructional services to students enrolled in public LEAs. Other prominent services offered by units of this type were: research and development and evaluation services; planning services; and, selected management services. Cooperative ESA units tended to concentrate on:

- o direct instructional services, especially education of children with handicapped conditions;
- o indirect instructional services, especially media and library and professional staff development; and
- o a limit range of management services, especially purchasing services.

Only a minority of units of this type offered services to the state education agency or to nonpublic schools.

9. A majority of all three types experienced a growth in the size of their program offerings during the three year period 1974-75 to 1977-78.
10. The average staff of the generally more comprehensive Special District ESAs was substantially greater than the average size of Regionalzed SEA and Cooperative ESAs, as would be expected. Moreover, a greater percentage of Special District than Cooperative units reported an increase in staff size from 1974-75 to 1977-78. Regionalized SEA/ESAs tended to experience decreases in the number of staff members assigned to the units.
11. A greater percentage of Special District as compared to Cooperative networks are authorized to own facilities. The latter tend to receive rent-free space from public LEAs or from another governmental subdivision.
12. A majority of the Special District and Regionalized SEA/ESA networks are formally involved in one or more aspects of the state regulatory system governing public LEAs. Only a few

of the Cooperative systems are, most typically, on a voluntary basis.

The following major observations are offered regarding the three types of ESA networks:

1. State involvement in the workings of the three types of networks appears to be the most extensive for Regionalized SEA/ESAs. The involvement of the state is judged to be moderate for Special District systems and limited for Cooperative networks.
2. Public LEA involvement appears to be most extensive in the workings of Cooperative networks, followed by Special District and Regionalized systems.
3. Direct public participation in the workings of all three types appears to be limited.
4. Federal involvement in the workings of all three types, while limited in scope, nonetheless appears to be critical, especially with regard to the administration by the units of federal program initiatives and the receipt of federal funding.
5. A majority of Special District networks appear to be making the most significant contributions to what are regarded to be universal priorities of state systems of elementary-secondary education. This observation is supported by the fact that most of the networks of this type possess the following features:

a. they have an adequate legal framework, thus they tend to be regarded as legitimate partners in the state system of education;

b. they are statewide in scope, thus able to potentially relate to all public LEAs in the state.

c. The membership of public LEAs is mandatory, thus assuring that the networks can potentially relate to local districts in a way not possible if membership were permissive;

d. they have a degree of organizational stability, thus promoting their continuity;

e. they generally have the most dependable financial support base;

f. they possess more comprehensive staffing resources; and

g. they offer a more comprehensive array of programs and services.

6. Similarly, a majority of Special District networks appear to be making the most significant contributions to what are regarded to be requirements for the improvements of educational practice at the public LEA level. The same general approach used in #5 above serves as the basis for this observation.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Various structural approaches to improve state systems of elementary and secondary education have been used in recent years. The improvement

of schools in rural areas has been a primary motive of many of these efforts.

The most frequently employed structural modification argued for in the immediate post World War II period was to require, or promote in other ways, the reorganization of local districts into larger administrative units. This approach resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of operating public LEAs through the decaded of the 1950s and 1960s. However little use has been made of the alternative thus far in the 1970s.

Three other structural approaches gained widespread use in the past approximately fifteen years. Interest in these three approaches appears to parallel the demise of the reorganization movement. The three options are: the provision of specialized services from a decentralized state education agency, the formation of special district education service agencies and the development of education cooperatives. Each option has its supporters and opponents.

A soon to be released study of the characteristics of thirty-one networks of all three types of service agencies in twenty-six states suggests that a majority of the Special District education service agencies tend to provide more comprehensive programs and services to public LEAs than do a majority of the Regionalized and Cooperative ESA networks.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

How states organize to deliver services to local schools is the business of the respective states and not a matter for federal polixy.

Assuring that whatever delivery system a state elects results in an equitable distribution of high quality services, however, is of fundamental federal interest. With this in mind, the following five recommendations are offered for consideration. It is to be noted that most of the recommendations do not represent significant new policy initiatives. Rather, most can be accomplished within existing legislative provisions and require only administrative adoptions.

1. The Federal government, both in legislation and in administrative regulations and guidelines, should adopt a consistent policy regarding the eligibility of education service agencies to receive federal funds.

In the past there have been instances where ESAs have been ineligible for funds. More commonly, they simply have not been mentioned in legislation or regulations, creating confusion about eligibility. For some types of Federal legislation, such as P.L. 94-142, sparsely populated rural areas might be eliminated as potential beneficiaries if the legislation did not permit collaboration through some cooperative service arrangement. Standard language needs to be developed which accounts for the variety of types of middle echelon organizational units which exist. Care must be taken that unusual organizational units do not become ineligible simply because of unusual terminology.

2. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) should accelerate its present efforts to gather data on education service agencies.

Both single and multi-purpose service agencies have proliferated now to the extent that they can no longer be ignored as part of the nationwide system of elementary and secondary education. A recently

developed directory[5] of ESAs, which is the most extensive to date, contains approximately 1200 listings. Absent from the directory may be another large number of education service agencies which are not known even to their state education agencies.

While NCES is now attempting to gather some data on ESAs, there is no overall plan to add ESA data to the regular statistical reports published by the agency. Steps should be taken to develop the necessary terminology and a design for gathering statistics on a systematic basis in order to report the activity of this important segment of American education.

3. Federal research, dissemination and school improvement efforts should be specifically designed to take advantage of the unique capability of education service agencies to service schools in rural areas.

Because they are so close to the schools they serve and yet have access to a wider range of resources than their component schools, ESAs are uniquely situated to do action research, to disseminate to schools the best of research and experience-based knowledge and to work with schools in a myriad of school improvement activities. In fact, it would appear that ESAs are now far more active in school improvement activities with rural schools than are colleges and universities. Federal agencies have not yet learned to fully capitalize on this capacity of ESAs. A national policy for research, dissemination and school improvement must acknowledge and create a role for ESAs if it is to be effective in addressing rural school needs.

4. Agencies administering federal programs which affect rural schools should carefully review state plans to ensure that all school districts are receiving their fair share of ser-

vices. Moreover, agencies should provide incentives for cooperative arrangements where they are warranted and where they are locally desired.

The overriding intent of this recommendation is to insure that every possible incentive is used by federal agencies in promoting the best use of federal monies in support of national priorities. All too often, many state plans for the implementation of federal inititives are deficient in that they expect all local districts to independently process the organizational capability to fully respond to all aspects of the program initiative. Moreover, in other instances, federal monies appear to be used to help create multiple ESA networks in a single state and thus unwittingly contribute to a fractionalism of planning and cooperative efforts among units of school government, the selection of both human and fiscal resources that can be brought to bear on issues, many of which are multi-faceted in nature, increase confusion on the part of public LEAs and help create awkward relationships between the service agencies. While close monitoring by federal agencies of plans developed at the state level raises serious concerns regarding federal-state relationships, it would seem that a more careful check on the feasibility of state plans is warranted.

5. Rural economic development efforts should consider the potential of using education service agencies as a mechanism for greater coordinatuon and cooperation between units of school government and general government.

Many education service agencies possess the organizational and programming prerequisites to address areawide economic and social problems. They frequently are the only units in the educational community

having an areawide perspective. Rural economic development activities have yet to fully capitalize on the potential of ESAs to serve as a bridge to the educational community, or to serve as important participants in the planning and implementation of developmental activities.

FOOTNOTES

1. All data on school reorganization patterns used in this paper were computed from reports published by the National Center for Educational Statistics, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.

2. For example, in the Fall, 1976, 27.3 percent of the operating districts enrolled fewer than 300 pupils. Another 61.1 percent enrolled fewer than 5,000 students (Statistics on Public Elementary and Secondary Education, Fall, 1976, National Center for Educational Statistics, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C. p. xvi.)

3. For four recent studies on educational cooperatives, see: Larry W. Hudges and C.M. Achilles, Project Directors, Interpretative Study of Research and Development Relative to Educational Cooperatives, Bureau of Research, Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C., 1971, 173 pp.; Richard J. Lavin and Jean E. Sanders, A Review of Educational Cooperatives and Their Various Forms, Merrimack Education Center, Chelmsford, Massachusetts, 1974, 120 pp.; Harold S. Davis, Educational Service Centers in the U.S.A., Connecticut State Department of Education, Hartford, 1976, 103 pp.; and John D. Waller, Dona M. Kemp, and John W. Scanlon, Supporting Analyses for an Assessment of the Appalachian Regional Commission's Regional Education Service Agencies Program, The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., 1976, 112 pp.

4. Education Service Agencies: Status and Trends, Education Service Agency Study Series, Report No. I, Stephens Associates, College Park, Maryland, June, 1979 (Subcontract with Edgewood Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas, National Institute of Education, DHEW, Grant #OE-G-0-72-4449).

5. A Directory of Education Service Agencies, 1977-78, Education Service Agency Study Series, Report No. IV, Stephen Associates, College Park, Maryland, February, 1979 (Subcontract with the AASA/National Organization of County, Intermediate and Education Service Agencies, U.S. Office of Education, DHEW, OE#300-78-0056).